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ABSTRACT

There is much more to a learning disabled (LD) child's successful learning than part-to-whole or whole-to-part instruction. Among the many factors to be considered are his/her learning style, interests, abilities, aptitudes, health, and parental support. Instructional programs for learning disabled children should be based on the students' uniqueness just as it should be for all other children. Educators should be aware of the research done with LD children and should challenge any findings which are not found to be so in their experience with LD children. Parental support should be sought and successes should be shared with colleagues. Experience with children of all ages shows that in order to include all children, teachers must beware of letting the instructional pendulum swing too far in any one direction. There is a place for both whole-to-part and part-to-whole instruction for LD students, as those students favoring whole language instruction can profit by some part-to-whole instruction and those favoring part-to-whole instruction can profit by some whole language instruction. (RS)

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Whole Language and the Learning Disabled

Susan Partridge

The learning disabled, who are they? Some so labeled may not be disabled at all. Hollingsworth and Reutzel (5) write: "Rather than examining the instructional program, philosophy, and practices used to treat the language-learning disabled child, the diagnosis and evaluation of educators in the past was usually focused on the child and what was organically, intellectually, or functionally inadequate with the organism. A language-learning disability was viewed as something innately wrong with the child and not a manifestation of the potential inadequacies of a particular program, philosophy or practice (Goodman 1986)." They then explain the beliefs of several as to how learning-disabled children learn best:

> Mary Poplin (1984) indicated that the learning disabled child often learns best through his collective experiences which is best accounted for by the use of a holistic model. Under a holistic model, the emphasis on a deficit driven approach to the learning disabled is shifted toward a strengths, ability and child-needs-oriented perspective. Poplin clarifies this position by explaining that several factors are crucial to a successful learning experience for the learning disabled child: (a) linking instruction to past and present experiences, (b) arranging physical variables to serve the needs of the child, and (c) carefully considering natural interests, abilities, and aptitudes.
>
> Learning disabled children can best learn to read and write in much the same way they learned to speak (Holdaway 1979). LD children become familiar with meaningful printed materials and find support for naturally progressing toward a state of cognitive clarity regarding the functions and purposes for using printed language through immersion in a print-rich environment (Downing 1984; Hiebert 1986). The language-learning disabled child learns naturally from exposure and use rather than from isolated instructional drills. Simply put, learning occurs best where there is active involvement in an

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interesting and functionally relevant language-learning opportunity (McNutt 1984; Carbo 1987).

Hollingsworth and Reutzel offer a substantial number of instructional practices which, they say, are, or can be, considered consistent with Whole Language Theory. They add that these selected practices are highly interactive and social in nature and, therefore, help the LD child acquire the social skills necessary to function in the resource room as well as in the regular classroom. The practices offered follow: (1) Impress Method, (2) Oral Reading Variations, (3) Reading Aloud, (4) Language Experience Approach, (5) Predictable Story Books, (6) Word Rubberbanding, (7) the Shared Reading Experience, (8) the Writing Process Approach, (9) Sustained Silent Writing, (10) Sustained Silent Reading, (11) Contextual Reading Clues or Cloze, and (12) Logo Language or Environmental Print.

The intent is not to discredit any one of these practices, as throughout decades of personal experience in the field of reading instruction, success for some students in each practice has been witnessed, but a lack of it for others. The solution isn't as easy as using a particular instructional program with a student; it's much more complex. Consider the case of Dino:

Dino was a rather small Italian boy in the ninth grade. He was being given special instruction in reading by a "reading teacher." The reading teacher was using the Language Experience Approach with Dino and felt that progress was being made, but, apparently, this wasn't Dino's idea of progress in reading, for

when the reading supervisor met him in the hall one day and congratulated him, his loud, clear and angry response, "That ain't readin'! Readin's in a book!", left no doubt as to how Dino felt about his reported progress.

Witness has been borne, too, to a reluctance on the part of some students to dictate stories. As a matter of fact, the role of writing apprehension in writing competency and performance has been investigated by Faigley et al. It was hypothesized that there would be differences in performance between the high apprehensives and the low apprehensives. The hypothesis for the writing competency as measured by standardized tests was upheld as was the hypothesis for the writing of a narrative-descriptive essay in which self was emphasized. However, the hypothesis for an argumentative essay in which students were asked not to use personal experience was not confirmed. A study such as this might alert teachers to the fact that some children might be apprehensive about dictating stories. As one little fellow put it, "I don't spill all my guts!"

Hollingsworth and Reutzel (6) offer an elaborate chart, "Contrasting Whole Language Theory." In the section, "Child Behavior," some of their beliefs follow:

What It Is	What It Isn't
Children often choose their own topics/purposes for writing	Children follow the assigned assigned purposes for writing
Children often assist one another in reading and writing	Children often compete with one another in reading and writing

Children use language to learn about their language	Children learn language conventions to use language
Children participate more often in discussion, etc.	Children often work privately and quietly at their desks

As stated earlier, personal witness has been borne throughout decades to success with whole language. Some children have had great difficulty with a program in which great stress was placed upon phonics. Little John, a normal seven-year-old second grader, was one of many observed cases in which it was clear that another approach needed to be tried.

John was found weeping uncontrollably one morning. When asked what the trouble was, he said, "It's them there valves that gits me." His teacher had given him two cards. On one card she had written get, on the other got. John had taken them home to study, but when he arrived at school the next morning he couldn't remember which was which.

The visiting reading supervisor happened to be in the building that morning. She determined that John knew the words, not and pet. She wrote get under pet and got under not. She had John look at the pairs and listen to their sounds to note similarities and differences. John had no more trouble with these words as something he knew was used to learn what was troubling him.

John had caring parents and enjoyed telling about going fishing with his father. The pictures he drew of these experiences seemed extraordinary for a seven-year-old; they contained a lot of detail and were greatly admired by his classmates. The

holistic model seemed to be John's forte.

Rocky, too, was having trouble learning to read. when he was accepted as a member of Little League, he became extremely interested in baseball. He learned that his neighbor's newspapers had pictures of baseball players and stories about them, so he made frequent visits to his neighbor, an educated person, requested help with words, cut out some of the articles and took them home with him. This personal attention, the holistic model and Rocky's keen interest in baseball seemed right, for his school record continued to improve.

It is so encouraging to note that some educators interested in whole language learning have made it clear that there are other factors crucial to successful learning experiences. Mary Poplin, mentioned earlier, stated several, one of which was "Carefully considering natural interests, abilities, and aptitudes."

The Dunns, R. and K. (1), have found twenty-one elements to be considered in determining a child's learning style. These elements, concerned with all pertinent physical, emotional, sociological, and environmental factors are offered below:

I. Environmental
   1. Sound
   2. Light
   3. Temperature
   4. Design

II. Emotional
   1. Motivation
   2. Persistence
   3. Responsibility
   4. Structure

III. Sociological
   1. Colleagues
   2. Self
   3. Pair
   4. Team

IV. Physical
   1. Perceptual
   2. Intake
   3. Time
   4. Mobility

V. Psychological
   1. Analytic
   2. Global
   3. Cerebral Dominance
   4. Reflective
   5. Impulsive

This list also emphasizes the need for the consideration of many factors if all children are to have successful reading experiences. Despite the fact that each child is a unique individual, mass instruction has been readily observed throughout decades.

Barbara Vitale (8) who did considerable work with a right-brained approach to learning, wrote this about the whole-word approach: "Many children who tested right-brained had difficulty with any type of phonics. Single sounds were disastrous for these children. They could not take pieces and put them together. I had to give them a whole word to learn."

It is generally conceded that our schools have adhered to a left-hemispheric approach. Phonics continues to be an important part of the first grade reading curriculum, and since it's based on part-to-whole, is said to favor the child with the dominant left hemisphere. The whole-to-part approach is said to be that of the dominantly "right-brained" child.

From studies that have been made of the brain, Gertrude Webb (9) has offered a number of conclusions which we can safely draw, among them are:

> That neither left or right hemisphere is better or less able than the other. Rather, they differ in function.

That in over 90% of the right-handed "normal" population, the left hemisphere is superior in language and in sequential, symbolic and analytical, logical reasoning; the right hemisphere is superior in visuo-spatial, non-verbal, synthetic reasoning.

That the right hemisphere does perform some language tasks at concrete levels (e.g., naming nouns and verbs), while the left hemisphere performs some concrete visuo-spatial tasks.

Webb questions, "Does it not make sense that the right and left hemispheres work cooperatively to create a fully rounded view of the world?" She quotes Duffy, "Man is bilateral, so is his body designed, two legs, two arms, two hemispheres (Duffy, 1981). She advises teachers thus: "Let us as teachers help our students develop competence through an understanding of the need for the brains to work together," and she offers a number of teaching suggestions for each hemisphere.

Webb warns teachers thus:

"Lest we forget our left-brained learners who may do very well academically because of their language superiority, but who may be deficient in visual-spatial skills, encourage them to draw images of what they are discussing, to doodle, to follow maps, to give directions, to respect and develop the right sides of their brains. Moving into a world of graphics and computers, such skills may prove critical in the real world of the 1990's."

For those whose language skills are weak but whose favored learning modality is found to be visual, Webb advises:

Respect right brain competencies.
Approve the visual way of learning.
Set up visual tasks as an introduction to a

problem.

Allow such students to express their ideas visually.

Encourage the learner to talk, to listen, and to ask questions.

To build written language skills, use a visual base.

When the preferred learning style isn't readily observable, there are a number of tools for determining it. Webb mentions the Murphy-Talabach "Look-See-Do" model (Murphy and Talabach, 1980).

The wrong use of an instructional practice has been observed on numerous occasions. The late Dr. Emmett Betts told of demonstrating the Fernald technique (tracing) to a group of teachers. He said he warned the teachers that this technique would be used on only a small percentage of children in their classes. Several weeks later, Dr. Betts visited the schools where these teachers taught and was startled to see whole classes practicing the technique. There is documented evidence that Grace Fernald had much success with her structural practice which involved the many senses -- Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic and Tactile (VAKT). Her success was, undoubtedly, due to using the technique with those who stood to profit by it as well as her concern for children's thoughts and feelings about learning.

Webb's advice about respecting and accommodating the holistic learners and those who profit by part-to-whole learning seems a sound practice. Often reports about success are misleading. Witness has been borne again and again to children who learned to read in a program in which phonics received a lot

of attention, become good readers. It was learned, however, that these children came from homes in which reading was given top priority. Their parents read; they read to the children; they took them to the library; and helped them with logo language and environmental print. The children profited by these whole language experiences, and, undoubtedly, found some use for their phonics knowledge.

Roger Farr (3), a noted reading specialist, feels that there is "a place for basal readers under the whole language umbrella." Farr admits that proponents of whole language instruction do have some concerns about the use of basal readers. He mentions "separate skills instruction," resulting in workbook pages, ditto masters, etc. as well as the lack of freedom of choice dictated by the lockstep use of the stories in the basals. He then points out issues on which basals and whole language philosophy coincide. He explains:

> Basals include excellent stories written by the nation's best children's authors. These stories are used as springboards to a variety of wonderful children's books. Moreover, most basal readers encourage teachers to choose from the stories and activities included rather than using all of them. In addition, writing activities and a wide range of creative applications are now standard fare in most basals - and all of these are encouraged under the whole language umbrella.

Farr adds that basals have to appeal to a broad audience of educators and students, and, therefore, can't espouse one philosophy to the complete exclusion of the others. He adds that basals allow for teacher choice in that they provide ample

activities and materials so that a teacher can use the materials within the philosophy that guides his or her best instruction. He feels that if they did not now exist, basals in some form would almost certainly be invented.

The transition from managing the traditional classroom to managing the whole langauge classroom will require training, re-training, and supporting teachers if the transition is to be successful, for some teachers have confessed that they simply cannot teach "unless all eyes are on them."

Kenneth Goodman (4), who is considered a whole language expert, has offered guidelines to help ensure a smooth and successful transition to whole language instruction. The guidelines follow:

Set lines of communication.
Resolve the noise problem.
Maintain order.
Plan.
Evaluate often.
Bring kids and parents along.
Keep administrators on your side.

Under each heading, Goodman offers considerable detail. Decades of educational experience have been convincing in the fact that following these guidelines, though not an insurmountable task, is certainly a challenging one.

Goodman's advice about creating small groups is sound. He says, "Make sure that the participants know what they are expected to do and that they have sense of how to organize themselves to do it." It is felt that the personalities of the

group members should also be carefully considered. Throughout decades, witness has been borne to a complete takeover of a group by an aggressive child or two. The shy child was completely ignored.

Witness has been borne, too, to successful use of pairing and grouping. An example comes to mind: The junior high school boys and girls in the group had a lot in common: they all had a reading problem; they liked each other; they were competitive; they clearly understood what they were to do; and they set about the task diligently. This observation was in complete contrast to other observed groups in which chaos reigned supreme.

Priscilla L. Vail (7), a learning specialist and teacher, sees three drawbacks to the whole language movement:

> 1. The first is the tenet that reading is a "psychological guessing game"; it is the overall idea that matters; accuracy is for nitpickers. But this shortchanges students, inviting them to swim in muddy water instead of in clear pools.
>
> 2. The second drawback is the relatively exclusive reliance on story. In addition to narrative, students must learn to read for content in science, history, and mathematics as well as in English class. This skill usually does not develop without training.
>
> 3. Here is the third drawback. Last winter the principal of a K-9 school called my colleague. "Please come look at our reading program. Over the last three years our scores have dropped steadily, and our fifth and sixth graders don't even like to read any more. What's happening?"
>
> It turned out that his school had always had a rich library, drama, and literature program, balanced by a skills sequence. Wanting to be up with the times, they had adopted whole language. But instead of blending the new program into the status quo, they traded away the skills for

> additional doses of the literary element, which was already beautifully represented. This tipped the balance badly away from competence in mechanics.

Vail is by no means opposed to whole language and she suggests several ways of blending it with a skills program. Her suggestions follow:

> From birth to kindergarten, let's use everything whole language proponents are recommending: story books for reading aloud, conversation, coziness, and verbal reasoning. From kindergarten through third grade, let's add regular, daily multisensory training to the playful literary offerings, making them equal partners in our teaching. From fourth grade on, let's offer thorough grounding in word analysis and continued training in handwriting, joining those in a bond of common purpose to the aesthetics and experimentation in literature.

Vail recommends keeping the "w" in whole language and thus keep our children out of the hole. She explains that without the "w", there is only a hole in whole language. She urges us to keep the "w" which she says stands for "wonder" -- the wonder of the beauty and mystery that words convey; "the works" -- meaning the big picture as well as the gears and springs that make up the machinery, which, she say, stands for the "welcome" of words offered and received.

Vail's expressed concern for reading in the content areas, "In addition to narrative, students must learn to read for content in science, history, and mathematics as well as in English class. This skill usually does not develop without training", has been voiced by teachers and students alike.

The supporters of whole language feel that they do not neglect skills; it's just that their approach is different. For example, they believe that phonics principles should be taught in known sight words using the analytic approach, not in isolation using the synthetic approach. They feel, too, that instruction should take place in sentence level language units or larger and that learning begins with the concrete and moves to the abstract.

Conclusion

It is concluded that there is a place for both whole-to-part and part-to-whole instruction for LD students, as those favoring whole language instruction can profit by some part-to-whole instruction and those favoring part-to-whole instruction can profit by some whole language instruction.

Implications

An accurate diagnosis of a child's learning problem should be made. This should be followed by a program designed to overcome his/her problem.

Each child is a unique individual; the LD children are no exception.

Instructional programs for LD children should be based on their uniqueness just as it should be for all other children.

There's much more to a child's successful learning than part-to-whole or whole-to-part instruction. Among the many factors to be considered are his/her learning style, interests,

abilities, aptitudes, health, parental support -- all the physical, emotional, sociological and environmental factors as provided by the Dunns (mentioned earlier in this report).

Educators should be aware of the research done with LD children and should challenge any findings which are not found to be so in their experience with LD children.

Parental support should be sought.

Successes should be shared with colleagues.

In order to include all children, beware of letting the instructional pendulum swing too far in any one direction.

Beware of "bandwagon hopping." Instructional programs that recognize, respect, and accommodate the uniqueness of every child are far more complex than merely adopting what is supposed to be a "cure-all program."

Individualize instruction to the greatest extent possible, for no two children are exactly alike. If it is believed that a child stands to gain nothing from a ditto sheet or workbook pages, allow him/her to go to the resource room, the library or, perhaps, to do some sustained reading or writing in the classroom or to engage in some other activity profitable and pleasing to him/her.

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*Hands-on Approaches to Learning Style, the most up-to-date and least expensive information, compiled by Rita Dunn, is available at the:

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